

The Indians Roundtable: Shapiro Extension A Good Thing?

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Saturday, February 10 2007 7:00 PM -



“The Indians Roundtable” will be a regular weekly Sunday feature throughout the baseball season. One question. Several different answers from TheClevelandFan.com Indians panel.

News came out this past week that the Indians were close to agreeing on an extension with General Manager Mark Shapiro, and that a deal would be officially announced anytime between now and sometime in Spring Training.

While the specifics of the rumored deal are unknown at this time, it looks like Shapiro is now locked in with the Tribe for several more years. The question is, is this a good or bad thing for the organization?

We polled the Indians writers of The Cleveland Fan for their take on the news. Some of the replies were similar, but each offered up some fresh takes – and some of the replies may surprise you:

Tony Lastoria: From this corner, keeping Shapiro on board for several more years is a

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good thing. The organization probably would have survived had he left, especially since Assistant GM Chris Antonetti is virtually a Shapiro clone. Antonetti likely would have been Shapiro's successor in 2008 had he left, but going from Shapiro to Antonetti would have been a huge drop in experience at the GM position. By keeping Shapiro on board, it will help maintain continuity with Shapiro's philosophy that has been adopted organization-wise, and also provide more time for Shapiro's vision (plan) to come better into focus.

Sure, Shapiro has made some mistakes - notably the [Roberto Alomar trade](#) and the [Brand on Phillips Debacle](#)

- but he has also shown an ability to learn from those mistakes and not repeat them. Shapiro is also very conservative in the roster moves he makes when it comes to trades and free agents - although ownership may be a big reason for that - and he also tends to be a little [over-protective of his prospects](#)

. And, Shapiro's biggest problem might be his extreme loyalty to manager Eric Wedge.

That said, Shapiro did a good job cleaning house and starting over to where this organization's farm system is completely rebuilt and arguably the deepest in baseball and should consistently pump out talent every year. In addition to that, he has been able to establish a solid core of players at the major league level to make a championship run with. If Shapiro continues to be open to new ideas and learning from mistakes, and maybe takes the shackles off and explores more prospects for major-league talent trades, he'll moved to the penthouse suite with other top GMs like Terry Ryan and John Schuerholtz. Some may disagree, but the Indians window of opportunity has just swung open and isn't in danger of closing anytime soon. A lot of this credit goes to Shapiro.

[Steve Buffum:](#) I think this is a good move for the organization, as unlike the Browns' supposed "continuity is good" kick, the Indians actually have some track record of success. It has been pointed out many times that the team has not made the playoffs during Shapiro's watch. It is indisputable that Shapiro has made moves that were either bad risks (Aaron Boone) or simply bad ideas (Ramon Vazquez). But overall the direction of the team has been good, and even if Shapiro isn't directly responsible for every success (I doubt he personally recommended every draft choice), he helped assemble and oversee the management team that has done a good job.

The other factor here is that I think Shapiro is a better GM in 2007 than he was in 2003. This comes from experience as well as knowledge and hard work. It's easy to forget that Shapiro

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is only 39: the alternative to extending Shapiro is hiring someone else. Short of drawing Terry Ryan or Brian Cashman away from their teams, is there anyone you'd feel comfortable handing the reins to mid-stream? Maybe Antonetti, but he'd be Shapiro 2003. Maybe someone from another organization, but again, if you like the direction, isn't it better to have someone who shared in the steering, who already knows what the strengths and weaknesses are?

There is one dark cloud in all of this, though: Eric Wedge. Mark Shapiro is attached at the hip to Wedge: unless Wedge does something truly egregious like leave Sabathia in for a 16-inning complete game, drive drunk into the Terminal Tower, or grow his moustache back, he will manage the Cleveland Indians. I may have been too subtle and coy about this in the past, but I will spell it out: ***I do not think Eric Wedge is a good manager and want him replaced***

This becomes pretty unlikely, so obviously, that's a pretty dark cloud.

Overall, I am for the extension. Play ball!

[Rich Swerbinsky](#): It's good news to me. Listen, there's a lot to nitpick Shapiro about. The Robby trade, Lawton, Gutierrez, letting Howry go, trading Brandon Phillips, his ego, the Wedge Love Affair and no playoffs in his tenure as GM immediately come to mind.

Shapiro has really created his own style of "Moneyball" in my view. A system reliant on one year contracts to reclamation projects and injury risks, and heavy on paying two guys 2-3 million a year apiece to platoon at a spot instead of backing up the Brinks Truck for one high priced player. This season will be the best indicator yet of Shapiro's ability as a GM.

In the end though, who the hell else are we going to bring in here that's going to be better than Mark? He's Ivy League educated, been around the game his whole life, well respected around the league, and has been in this organization forever. He's been hamstrung financially

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in past seasons, and given a legitimate budget this winter, orchestrated an off-season that I was pretty happy with.

Cris Sykes: Mark Shapiro is the epitome of average. Most of his moves are reactionary, based on poor decisions he made in the past. His unwillingness to go the extra mile on a BJ Ryan and Bob Howry one year, led to the need for spending a majority of his free agent budget on the bullpen the next year.

Shapiro has shown zero ability to go out and convince quality free agents that Cleveland is a place where they can come and win a championship. All I can remember is an interview where Mark said all he felt he needed to do was allow free agents the chance to sit down with this staff, see what they are all about and players would jump at the chance to come here. Yet, we have finished second an unbelievable number of times.

My biggest issue with Shapiro is his steadfast support for his buddy Eric Wedge. This duo has had two months of great baseball in the time they have been the leaders of this team. The worst part was, with an opportunity to make a move at the trade deadline that year; Shapiro took a pass, leaving the Indians a game short of the play-offs. I think the better plan would have been to wait to see how this year's free agents performed, and if the Indians win the 90+ games it takes to compete, talk about a new deal. If he wants to leave after a successful year, I believe any GM could come in here and perform at this level.

Erik Cassano: I think Mark Shapiro's extension is great news. Shapiro is one of the best GMs in the game, and people with far more inside knowledge than myself share that opinion. You can point to the Roberto Alomar trade and the bullpen disasters of '04 and '06 as the black marks on Shapiro's resume, but he also managed to piece together the best bullpen in baseball in 2005.

It's easy to pick at what Shapiro has done wrong, but don't forget the odds he was facing

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upon taking this job. With a far-reduced payroll, he had to rebuild this team in the span of five years. Last season notwithstanding, he was able to do that. This team was playoff-caliber again by 2004 and 2005. He doesn't have a playoff appearance on his resume yet, but for three years, he has had this team consistently only a few pieces away from the playoffs, and possibly title contention.

Consider the rebuilding alternative: The Tigers and Royals. Detroit had to wait 20 years to become competitive again, and Kansas City is still waiting. What Shapiro did with the resources he had was impressive, maybe even unprecedented. Results are what matters, and if you're talking October, then yes, Shapiro still has something to prove. But the mere fact that he compressed a decade or more of rebuilding down to less than five years is a testament to his talent and skill. I'm happy he is staying.

Todd Dery: This is great news. There is nobody better equipped in dealing with the market constraints and the lack of a big money owner than Mark Shapiro. After a series of key blunders in his first year (The Robby Alomar trade essentially netting nothing; the Lawton and Gutierrez contracts), he has taken those experiences and mastered the art of stocking young talent. Trading Bartolo Colon for Grady Sizemore, Cliff Lee, and Brandon Phillips is one of the great fleeces of all-time, but when it went down, everyone thought Shapiro was nuts.

Nobody is perfect and GM's make mistakes, but what separates Shapiro from many of his peers is his willingness to admit those mistakes and learn from them. In this market, Shapiro is forced to use the "throw as many guys up against the wall and hope they stick" approach with scrap heap veterans. While nobody is crazy about that method, it has unearthed guys like Bob Howry, Casey Blake, and Rafael Betancourt. Terry Ryan perfected this craft in Minnesota while building a young, talented pitching staff. Sounds a lot like the Indians model to me.

Jarad Regano: Shapiro getting an extension has to be viewed as good news. While the torrid love affair with Wedge gets a little old, any replacement the Indians could have afforded would have come with much less experience. It also would have probably come from within.

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It is somewhat unsettling giving an extension to a guy who has not capitalized on what is now year #6 of a rebuild, but the choice had to be made now. In a perfect world, the Dolan's could have waited to see how 07 would have unfolded. However, if the Indians are in the hunt at that time, Shapiro would have been a hot commodity around the league. This was a good time for the Dolan's to bite the bullet and give up a little more organizational control.

[Jeff Rickel](#): While suspicious that Shapiro is responsible for holding the payroll back more than most Tribe fans think, this extension is great news for the Indians and the org's fans. Shapiro has consistently shown the ability to develop talent internally while attempting creative approaches to free agency to compensate for Cleveland's smaller market size.

I believe Mark has been a better steward of the farm system than John Hart ever was and that's important if the Tribe is to succeed now and in the future when you consider escalating salaries in MLB. It's hard to think that anyone could do much better in the Cleveland market unless they were able to go crazy on payroll every year - and even that is no guarantee for success. Mark Shapiro gives the Indians the best chance to compete in the modern MLB. If not for Shapiro then we might be back well into Colavito Curse mode.